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**ARDC Feature Unit
UNL Extension
in Saunders County**

**Extension - Your Front Door
To University Resources**

University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension is the people's "front door" to the vast array of University of Nebraska resources. Teaching, research and extension are the three major components that represent a rich and successful history of the Land Grant University System.

Today, Extension provides the technology transfer of new research findings to local citizens in more ways than ever before in history. Distance education (web, satellite, and home study-based program delivery) has made University faculty and educational programs available to citizens in their homes, at their work or via community learning centers.

Extension is the vital outreach arm of the University that has made the Land Grant system a phenomenal, time-tested successful institution in the United States. Extension began in 1914 helping American agriculture become what it is today, the world's premiere food production system. Extension is leading communities into the next millennium, leveraged with the latest technology, numerous collaborative team efforts and the same researched-based, unbiased information that has always been the staple product of the Extension system.

Extension has been tremendously successful at enhancing the lives of Nebraskans. Addressing the social economic and environmental issues of our communities is what extension is doing every day via individual consultations, workshops, clinics, on-farm research, mass media, e-mail, websites and programs, and direct teaching.

Your local Extension staff serves the Saunders County area as part of a statewide team of Extension professionals who work and share their talents across the state to meet individual, family and community needs in an efficient and effective manner.

In this issue of *Extended Visions*, we take a closer look at some of Extension's outreach efforts. If you have questions or have an interest in participating in the many programs that our office provides, feel free to call 800-529-8030, visit our office at the ARDC or the website at www.saunders.unl.edu. □

**Basics of Small Wind Turbines
Rescheduled - March 17**

The "Basics of Farm/Residential Small Wind Turbines" program, presented by Tony Jimenez and sponsored by the High Plains Extension Energy Team for Community Development, has been rescheduled for March 17. This is a pre-recorded webcast program with an added presentation.

John Hay, UNL Extension Educator, will be on hand at the program to discuss net metering and other topics specific to Nebraska. He will also be available to answer questions.

The program is scheduled for 9:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m. at the August N. Christenson Research and Education Building at the ARDC.

Topics include: applications, estimating small wind turbine production, policies & economics, the process for installing small wind turbines, small wind system components, and technology

questions. This program gives participants the tools needed to determine if a wind system is appropriate to a particular application and to avoid common pitfalls encountered in analyzing and executing small wind turbine projects.

Call (402)624-8030 to pre-register no later than March 16. □

**Get Your Free Radon Kit Now...
Learn More at Program on Mar. 17**

**"About 67% of the
homes in this county
that have been tested
have shown results
that are above EPA's
action level."**

**- Karna Dam
UNL Extension Educator**

linked to an increased risk for the development of lung cancer.

Karna Dam, UNL Extension Educator says, "Saunders County has been identified as a 'Zone 1' county which means that indoor levels could be expected to exceed 4 pCi/L. In fact, about 67% of the homes in this county that have been tested have shown results that are above EPA's action level. So, we felt this was an important program to pursue."

The UNL Extension office in Saunders County has test kits available for local residents who wish to participate in the radon testing program that is currently underway throughout the county.

The kits are being made available by Three Rivers District Health Department. UNL Extension and the health department hope all residents will take advantage of this opportunity to test their homes and consider fixing those with elevated levels of radon.

Radon is a radioactive gas that has been

A program will be held on Tuesday evening, March 17 to help homeowners interpret their test results and learn what measures can be taken to lower radon levels in homes. The session will be conducted at the Saunders County Extension office located at the ARDC beginning at 7:00 pm.

Kits can also be picked up at the Three Rivers District Health Department office in Wahoo and will also be available at the March 17 program. For complete details about the program, contact UNL Extension at (402)624-8030. □

**Ankersen Selected as
2008 Employee of the Year**

Sharron Ankersen has been selected as the recipient of the 2008 *Employee of the Year Award* at the ARDC.

Sponsored by the ARDC/UNL Extension in Saunders County Social Committee, fellow employees nominate candidates and supervisors, employees and the social committee then submit scoring forms.

Sharron is a 4-H secretary for UNL Extension in Saunders County. Also nominated were Mike Zoubek and Robert Weatherly.

A nominator for Sharron stated, "Sharron is extremely committed to the 4-H program. It is truly her passion. Over her tenure with Saunders County Extension, Sharron has served in many roles from her support staff duties to helping at the various shows and fairs. Her high energy level about what she does and about the 4-H program help our families maintain a level of excitement."

She has worked with the 4-H program for over 12 years and was a 4-H leader for 31 years.

In addition to receiving a plaque, Ankersen was also honored with prizes solicited and organized by the ARDC/UNL Extension in Saunders County Social Committee. Prize donors included the Champions Club, Behlen Manufacturing, and the Hilltop Country Club. Ankersen will also be recognized on a plaque displayed indefinitely at the ARDC August N. Christenson Research and Education Building.

This is the seventh year the award has been presented. Past winners can be viewed at <http://ardc.unl.edu/eoy.shtml>. □

**Moravec Receives
IANR Outstanding
Employee Award**

Lisa Moravec, Husker Genetics Staff Assistant, was named as the recipient of the UNL IANR Outstanding Employee Award for Office/Service Staff for January 2009. This high honor recognizes outstanding achievement by office/service staff within the UNL's Institute of Agriculture & Natural Resources.

A nominator stated, "The rapport Lisa has built with the public, staff, and peers is due to her patience, friendliness, and consideration for those around her. It is through these actions that she is

able to win the confidence and respect of others. her integrity, trustworthiness, and personal standards are the qualities that make Lisa an outstanding employee."

Another commented, "Lisa's commitment to excellence is her best quality."

Lisa is responsible for the business office functions of Husker Genetics since 2000, such as taking orders, accounting, and other duties. She possesses a bachelor's degree in Agriculture with a major in Ag Education from UNL. She and her husband, Kent, live near Ithaca and have a son and daughter. Husker Genetics production facilities and business office are located at the ARDC. □



Sharron Ankersen was presented with the Employee of the Year plaque by Mark Schroeder, Director.



Bob Weatherly (ARDC Farm Operations) and Mike Zoubek (Husker Genetics) were also nominated for the award. They are pictured with Mark Schroeder, ARDC Director.



Lisa Moravec (Husker Genetics) was named the IANR Outstanding Employee. Dan Duncan, ARD Assistant Dean and Director, presented Lisa with the award.


In This Issue...

- * ARDC FEATURE UNIT - UNL Extension in Saunders County
 - Agriculture and Natural Resources
 - Behind the Scenes
 - Demonstration Windbreak Planting
 - Extension Can Help...
 - Extension Offers Livestock Programs
 - Extension - Your Front Door to University Resources
 - Horticulture Extension in Saunders County
 - How Extension is Structured
 - Meet the Extension Staff
 - Nutrition Education Program
 - Saunders County 4-H... Experience It!
 - Summer Program Schedule Provides Education and Opportunity
 - The 4-H Project... What is it?
- * Ankersen Selected as 2008 Employee of the Year
- Basics of Small Wind Turbines
- * Get Your Free Radon Kit
- * Moravec Receives IANR Outstanding Employee Award
- * Mead Magnet School
- Zoo to You Gecko on Loan

ARDC Feature Unit

UNL Extension

in Saunders County



How Extension is Structured

The structure of the Saunders County Extension Office provides for a great deal of diversity and flexibility in an attempt to best serve the taxpayers of the county. The Extension program is composed of five broad subject matter areas: Healthy Families and Communities, 4-H Youth Development, Food Production & Natural Resources, Community and Residential Environment and Community Resource Development. Policies and direction of the Extension programs are guided by the Saunders County Extension Board, Saunders County Board of Supervisors, Extension staff and the University of Nebraska Extension Administration. A *Memorandum of Understanding and Constitution and Bylaws* has been developed by the above parties.

Extension Educators Keith Glewen, Karna Dam, Sara Ellicott, Sarah Browning and Casey Campbell are faculty members of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and their salaries are, therefore, not a part of the Saunders County Extension budget. Saunders County employees located in the Extension Office are Cheryl Dunbar Office Manager. Sharron Ankersen and Amy Virgl, are part-time 4-H Support Staff. The Extension budget provides resources to support the functions of the office. Keith Glewen serves as Unit Leader.

The Extension Office Team works directly with the County Board of Supervisors, University of Nebraska-Lincoln and ARDC administration and Extension Board in providing Extension programs which provide public value.

Nine individuals represent citizens of Saunders County on the Extension Board. Their volunteer role is to be the eyes and ears of the local Extension program. Each member represents a specific community sector or geographical area and also contributes to the overall program direction of the Extension outreach effort. The Saunders County Board of Supervisors appoints the Extension Board members to a three-year term of service. The President of the Saunders County 4-H Council also serves on the Extension Board. Current members include: Karen Beranek, Vaden Hellerich, Barb Rezac, Dr. Mark Urban, Patty Swanson, Larry Rasmussen, Mary Romanelli, Kevin Ziegenbein, and Dave Hull. Persons interested in being considered as an Extension Board candidate should contact Keith Glewen at the Extension Office. □

Demonstration Windbreak Planting at the Saunders County Extension Office

by Sarah Browning, UNL Extension Educator

In 2007, the ARDC received a \$16,000.00 grant from the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum to establish a demonstration windbreak planting. UNL Extension Educator Sarah Browning secured the funding. This planting will be used as a teaching and demonstration tool to help rural homeowners learn more about windbreak management. Homeowners lose windbreak trees to insect or disease problems, poor maintenance practices, drought, hail, windstorms, wildlife and mechanical damage. This site will be used to demonstrate proper tree selection and minimum input maintenance techniques.

Serious new pests, like Pine Wilt disease, have killed many Scotch and Austrian pine trees in the last five years throughout Saunders County. Nebraska may also soon see infestations of Emerald Ash Borer, a serious insect problem that will severely limit the usefulness of ash species in windbreak plantings. Education is necessary to teach landowners how to manage these new pests or, if a tree dies, what resistant replacement trees can be used.

With a limited selection of evergreen trees well-adapted to Nebraska's growing conditions, and with good resistance to pine wilt, landowners need to embrace a new philosophy in windbreak design that increases the use of deciduous trees and shrubs in windbreak plantings. Because of their height, large deciduous trees provide a greater area of wind protection, while shrubs provide protection close to the ground. The use of several species within a planting also limits the homeowners risk of loss if a new pest develops that threatens a particular tree species.

Phase I of this project was installed in 2008 and Phase II will be completed in 2009. A combination of evergreen and deciduous trees, and deciduous shrubs were used in the design. Evergreen tree species that have not been widely used in Nebraska are being trialed, so their performance and disease resistance can be assessed.

You can stop by and walk through the new planting, located along Highway 66, on the north side of the ARDC headquarters building. These trees and shrubs will serve as a long-term demonstration planting for program participants and commuters to watch as it matures and develops into a healthy windbreak. □



Abcancanker(above) - Proper watering can decrease a tree's susceptibility to disease infection.

Cercospora (below) - Tight spacing and monoculture planting lead to great disease infestation.



Horticulture Extension in Saunders County

Horticulture professionals, vegetable growers, acreage owners and homeowners can find answers to their questions through Sarah Browning at the Saunders County Extension Office. She also serves as a panelist for the popular gardening program "Backyard Farmer" and is featured every Monday morning on KHUB radio.

Sarah's office is in Fremont, but she is only a toll free phone call away, at 1-800-830-4855. Some questions about plant problems can be answered over the phone; however, a sample of the problem is often needed to diagnose insect or disease problems. Plant samples and a detailed description of the problem should be taken to the Saunders County Extension office.

Home visits are available for a minimal charge to diagnose difficult landscape problems, especially those involving lawns or trees. A short home visit, 30 minutes or less, is \$25 and a longer visit is \$35. If necessary, a sample of the problem can also be submitted for further diagnosis to the UNL Plant & Pest Diagnostic Clinic for an additional \$10.

Green industry professionals can subscribe to *HortUpdate*, a bi-monthly email newsletter with information on current pest problems and other important horticulture issues. Subscribe at the UNL Extension Horticulture web site, <http://extensionhorticulture.unl.edu>.

The *Master Gardener Program* is an important component of the horticulture outreach services provided by the Saunders County Extension Office. Participants take part in 40 hours of classroom training, then as volunteers they pass along their horticulture knowledge to beginning gardeners, helping them learn more about all aspects of horticulture. They can also be found volunteering throughout the county, including the Wahoo Library, Hanson House, Saunders County Fairgrounds, and the Saunders County Historical Society.

Along with the acreage programming team, Sarah develops a monthly acreage email newsletter focusing on important issues to acreage owners. She created and maintains "Acreage Insight", <http://acreage.unl.edu>, a web site for Nebraska acreage owners. □

Nutrition Education Program

Imagine not knowing if you will have enough food this month to feed your family. Unfortunately, this is a reality for many of our Nebraska families. On top of that, with a limited budget, as well as, a limited knowledge of nutrition, many of our families are consuming a diet that is inadequate in many of the essential nutrients that their bodies need. This is where the Nutrition Education Program (NEP) can help. NEP offers free nutrition education to limited resource families in 42 Nebraska Counties.



Casey Campbell teaches at the NEP Programs.

Casey Campbell is the Extension Assistant who runs the NEP program for Dodge, Saunders and Washington Counties. Her goal is to help these limited resource families by teaching them about general nutrition, as well as, how to manage their food dollars so that they have the resources to eat a healthy diet on a limited budget. Casey teaches NEP participants at multiple locations in her three counties. For example, nutrition education is available to participants in group classes at Care Corps Homeless Shelter and the Lutheran Family Service's

Building Families Boutique in Fremont, Nebraska. Casey also counsels participants individually at four WIC (the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for Women, Infants and Children) clinics in her three counties. Additionally, Casey is able to directly teach the children of her families by working with multiple Head Start classrooms to teach the children about nutrition, trying new foods and food safety.

Perhaps the best part of the Nutrition Education Program is that it is designed to be fun for the participants. For example, participants are involved in cooking demonstrations, activities, taste testing's and much more. Additionally, this program is designed to be convenient for the families. Therefore, participants have the option to learn individually or in small groups. Participants also have the option of learning at home through distance education lessons.

The Nutrition Education Program is made up of two federally funded nutrition programs called the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-Education (SNAP-Ed). NEP is sponsored by the UNL Extension and the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services. In order to be eligible for NEP, participants must meet income guidelines. For example, NEP is available to those who receive or qualify for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. For more information about the Nutrition Education Program, please contact Casey Campbell, MS, RD, LMNT at (402) 624-8022. □

Extension Offers Livestock Programs

Livestock production is very important to Saunders County and to the state of Nebraska. According to the National Agricultural Statistics Service, Nebraska Field Office, livestock production is a \$7.6 billion dollar industry in Nebraska, accounting for 64% of the state's total agricultural cash receipts in 2006. Cash receipts from all livestock and products ranks Nebraska third in the nation. Livestock and livestock products make up three of the six top Nebraska commodities; they are cattle and calves (1), hogs (4), and dairy products (6). In Saunders County and the counties that touch it, livestock sales receipts total nearly \$454 million according to the 2007 Census of Agriculture data; livestock production is very important to Nebraska's economy as a whole, as well as our local economy.

As an Extension Educator with a livestock focus, Sara Ellicott works with livestock producers in Saunders County and southeastern Nebraska, providing non-biased, research based information to the area's citizens about livestock production, and the issues and opportunities that it presents. This position was also established to work with livestock producers to identify niche marketing, value-added and diversification opportunities with livestock and to work with acreage owners to determine if livestock production is a possibility for their land. In addition to the adult (producer) component, 25% of Sara's time and responsibilities will be focused on youth development, mostly in the livestock area.

As the national trend of livestock production declines, it is even more important than ever that educational efforts continue to be made in this area. Profitability in the livestock sector is ever-important, as well as teaching about the opportunities out there for operators to expand their livestock operation or consider it again. With the world's population on the incline, producing safe, wholesome food also becomes more and more vital.

Thus far, programs have been offered related to cow-calf producers, backgrounders and feedlot operators, and meat goats, with additional programming in the works. If you have any questions, information, or suggestions for needed livestock programming in Saunders County or the southeast Nebraska region, please contact Sara Ellicott, (402) 624-8007, or sellicott2@unl.edu. □

ARDC Feature Unit
**UNL Extension
in Saunders County**

days of your income to pay for the food we eat during the course of the year. The American consumer is the envy of the world. Yet, collectively, we - as citizens of this country - take the above for granted.

The foundation to food production is the American farm operator. This doesn't suggest that all is fine on the farm. In fact, the opposite is true in many cases. But during the last century, food production in this country has become one of the great success stories of all mankind. Standing at the side of the American and Saunders County farmer has been the University of Nebraska – Lincoln Extension.

The Land Grant system has been viewed by many as a very successful change agent. All of the agriculture and natural resource educational programs that we provide are developed from unbiased research at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and other Land Grant Universities in each of the fifty states. We have partnered closely with county and the federal government for over ninety years to bring this information to farmers and industry.



Over 5,700 people have attended the Crop Management Diagnostic Clinics at the ARDC since 1996.

Participation in most Extension programs is voluntary and can be obtained by many different venues. However, in recent years, Extension has conducted programs that are required for farm operators and industry personnel as a result of regulatory requirements as directed by the EPA, Nebraska Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources Districts.

All Extension Educators in Saunders County develop and teach county, regional, and state-wide programs. In other instances, they work with University of Nebraska Specialists, Educators and other

Mark Your Calendars...

At the Saunders County Extension Office located at the ARDC August N. Christenson Research & Education Building

Crop Scout Training for Pest Managers
March 16

Private Pesticide Applicator Training
March 31

Field Crop Scout Training
May 12



Learn more about these and other UNL Extension programs at www.saunders.unl.edu. □

Sprayer Technology for Growers, Vo-Ag/Extension Educator In-Service CMDC Training, and Wheat Production/Pest Management Field Training.

Why does Extension offer these programs? An example of the impact of field days at the ARDC includes the Crop Management Diagnostic Clinics which impacted the management of over 3,700,000 crop acres in Nebraska.

The Extension Office also works closely with the Saunders County Livestock Association, Saunders County Corn Growers Association and Saunders County Soybean Growers Organization in developing and conducting educational programs. □

Agriculture and Natural Resources

by Keith Glewen, UNL Extension Educator

The American Farmer produces enough food to feed himself or herself and 144 other people for an entire year. And it requires about forty

Participation in most Extension programs is voluntary and can be obtained by many different venues. However, in recent years, Extension has conducted programs that are required for farm operators and industry personnel as a result of regulatory requirements as directed by the EPA, Nebraska Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources Districts.

All Extension Educators in Saunders County develop and teach county, regional, and state-wide programs. In other instances, they work with University of Nebraska Specialists,

Educators and other

Meet the Extension Staff

Sharron Ankersen is a 4-H secretary for UNL Extension in Saunders County and is very familiar with many components of 4-H. She is well-known in the community for her involvement with the program. She has worked as the 4-H secretary since 1996 and just recently shifted to part time status. She keeps records, works with the 4-H leaders and members, and helps at the fair. Sharron lives on an acreage near Colon. She has 4 grown children and 8 grandchildren. In her spare time, she enjoys horseback riding, camping and raising poodles.

As a UNL Extension Educator, **Sarah Browning** develops programming for horticulture professionals, vegetable growers and acreage owners. She provides general horticulture information for homeowners and serves as a panelist for the popular gardening program “Backyard Farmer”. Sarah has created and maintains two web sites- UNL Extension Horticulture, <http://extensionhorticulture.unl.edu/>, and Acreage Insights, <http://acreage.unl.edu/>. Sarah began working with UNL Extension as an Extension Educator since 2003. She received a B.Sc. in Horticulture from Northwest Missouri State University and obtained her M.S. in Plant Breeding from UNL.



Sarah Browning



Extension Staff (above): Sara Ellicott, Karna Dam, Casey Campbell and Keith Glewen. (Below) Cheryl Dunbar, Amy Virgl and Sharron Ankersen.



Casey Campbell, UNL Extension Assistant, works with the Nutrition Education Program (NEP). NEP is sponsored by the UNL Extension and the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services. The goal of the Nutrition Education Program is to provide nutrition education to those who currently receive or qualify for benefits from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

Casey has worked with NEP since 2005. She is a Registered Dietitian and a Licensed Medical Nutrition Therapist. Casey is also a certified fitness instructor. Casey completed her bachelors degree from Colorado State University in 2004 in the areas of Dietetics and Fitness. She then completed her Dietetic Internship from Iowa State University. Casey recently received her Masters Degree in Nutrition from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Casey and her husband, Chris, live in Lincoln.

Extension Educator, **Karna Dam** works with 4-H program and planning, developing and delivering educational programs to youth. Prior to joining the Saunders County team, Karna was with Extension in Washington County for 17 years. She has a Bachelor of Science Degree from UNL in Animal Science and a Masters Degree in Youth Development from UNL. Through her Extension experiences, she has developed a strong desire of working with youth and helping them to develop dynamic leadership skills.

Karna and her husband, Dwight, live on a farm near Hooper where they are involved with row crop, feedlot and a cow/calf operation. They have two sons, Derek and Dylan. Karna enjoys sports, music and is extremely active with music through her church in Hooper.

Cheryl Dunbar serves as the Office Manager and is responsible for financial management and processing, database management, and general organization of office functions. She has served in this role since 1995. Cheryl also serves on the ARDC/UNL Extension in Saunders County safety committee. She and her husband, Kevin make their home in Wahoo have three sons and two grandsons. Cheryl enjoys attending Nebraska baseball games and relaxing at the family cabin.

Sara Ellicott is the newest Extension Educator to join UNL Extension in Saunders County. She began her position in July 2008. Her role is to work primarily with livestock producers in Saunders County and the surrounding region. Additionally, some of her responsibilities and time will overlap with youth development. Directly, she seeks to provide adult educational programs relating to livestock with an emphasis in diversified livestock issues, acreage owners, value-added opportunities and the agro-environmental trail at the ARDC.

Sara grew up on a family farm and ranch operation in western Colorado. They have a cow-calf operation and produce corn

MEET THE EXTENSION STAFF - Cont. on P. 4

Behind the Scenes

UNL Extension in Saunders County offers many educational programs. And support staff play an important role in those programs – in ways you may not have even considered.

Perhaps, you have received information in the mail about an upcoming Extension or 4-H program. The support staff assists with making sure you know about the program in various ways...whether it be creating and maintaining a database or preparing a mailing.

Once you arrive at the program, support staff have prepared all the necessary materials, such as notebooks or handouts, name tags and they also attend to other program day logistics. Due to the many programs offered, office supply inventory must be constantly monitored and replenished on a budget.

Other duties include program registration, financial records, and processing fees for programs. And after the program, support staff is extensively involved in compiling program reports.

When you call or walk into the Extension office, the support staff is often the first contact that you have with UNL Extension. Support staff field many calls, questions and requests and locate the necessary resources or experts. And the support staff “takes the show on the road” each summer assisting with the many office details and other duties during the Saunders County Fair.

It is the team effort of the support staff and educators that enables UNL Extension in Saunders County to offer a variety of programs to meet the needs of our clientele. □

ARDC Feature Unit UNL Extension in Saunders County

Saunders County 4-H... Experience It!

by Karna Dam, UNL Extension Educator

Saunders County 4-H is a partnership effort of youth, adult volunteers and University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension Educators. Karna Dam has been the Extension Educator working directly with 4-H, Youth Education and Youth Livestock programming since 2007.

Sara Ellicott joined the staff in July 2008 and focuses 25% of her appointment on youth education in livestock.

In 2008, the Saunders County 4-H and youth education programs reached 695 young people. This was through the traditional 4-H program as well as special interest programs such as the Babysitting Basics class and after-school programming. Along with the youth involved in 4-H, Saunders County utilizes the expertise of many volunteers to help with clubs and a variety of other volunteer opportunities. One hundred forty-two adult volunteers helped to make 2008 a success. □

Extension Can Help...

We hope you have found the articles about UNL Extension to be informative. If you would like to learn more about what Extension has to offer - please visit the Saunders County website at: **www.saunders.unl.edu**.

These are challenging times. UNL Extension and eXtension can help answer questions about actions to help improve personal or family situations. Visit the UNL Extension website at **www.extension.unl.edu** to learn more. Individuals and families can find help with family budgeting, negotiating with creditors, solving financial problems, supermarket savings and reducing family stress by visiting the UNL Extension website.

And you can always contact us at (402)624-8030 or (800)529-8030 with program suggestions or for information on any of the articles you have read in this newsletter. □

MEET THE EXTENSION STAFF - Cont. from P. 3

and alfalfa. Sara graduated from Colorado State University in Fort Collins, Colorado with a B.Sc. Degree in Animal Science and a Master's in Agriculture, with a focus on Beef Industry Leadership.

Sara and her husband, Matt, live near Waverly on an acreage. They enjoy spending time outdoors, working around their place, anything livestock related, and spending time with family and friends.

Keith Glewen is an Extension Educator for the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. A native of Wisconsin, Keith received his B.Sc. degree at the University of Wisconsin - Platteville in Crop and Soil Science and M.S. degree from the University of Nebraska in Agronomy. His main area of program focus is row crop production, natural resources and environmental management. As an agronomist he has achieved success in developing field and classroom training programs for industry professionals and growers held annually across the state of Nebraska. Keith is registered with the American Society of Agronomy as a Certified Professional Agronomist.

The following is an abbreviated list of signature programs Keith is responsible for: Nebraska No-Till Conference, Nebraska Soybean & Feed Grains On-Farm Research Project, Soybean Management Field Days, Crop Management & Diagnostic Clinic Training Programs - ARDC, Solution Days - York, NE, Nebraska Soybean Day and Machinery Expo, and Irrigation and Energy Conservation Field Day for Corn Growers.

Keith and his wife, Sherry, live in Wahoo. They have four sons and a daughter. Keith enjoys gardening, landscaping and growing corn and soybeans.

Amy Virgl joined the 4-H staff in February as a part-time 4-H secretary. Amy has been involved in a variety of youth programs in the community. She lives on an acreage near Wahoo with her husband, John. They have two children that are involved in 4-H. In her spare time, Amy enjoys sharing family activities, watching her children in sports and school activities, gardening, cooking, and writing. □



The 4-H Project... What is it?

by Karna Dam, UNL Extension Educator

When many people think of 4-H, they think of learning to bake cookies or learning about livestock production through 4-H, it is much more broad than that. 4-H provides opportunities for youth to grow in a wide range of project areas. The 4-H project is the "gateway" to the rest of the 4-H program. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the project is the "gateway" to the 4-Her. Projects provide the basis of the 4-H program by offering various educational experiences. Carrying out a project will help the member "learn by doing" as well as learn "why" things happen the way they do.

In today's 4-H program, youth may explore how to start their own business through the ESI Entrepreneur project, or maybe they would like to learn about building and designing robots in the new 4-H Robotics project. There are certainly some new and exciting projects that have recently been introduced into the 4-H curriculum. However, the projects involving animals, nutrition, clothing and design are still very much a part of the 4-H program.

Participation in a 4-H project is a real life experience that helps 4-H members learn to make sound decision. Projects put the hands and mind to work. The selection of 4-H projects has expanded greatly over the years. There are over 100 different projects. Most of the projects have been planned with several phases so that a member may advance to more difficult and challenging activities within that project.

When selecting a project, the youth should consider the following: Does it meet your needs and interest? One nice thing about 4-H is that you are allowed to explore new areas. Often times, until we try something, we don't really know if we like it. The 4-H Pick-a-Project could be considered the buffet line of 4-H. It contains all of the 4-H projects avail-

able and youth may select what project may interest them. Youth and families should also consider if a project is compatible with the age and ability (physical and mental) of the child. 4-H wants to help youth develop skills. This is why many of the projects are developed in levels. By mastering the skills in the first level, it prepares that youth for what the next level will offer. You should also ask yourself if the project will challenge your child. It is the goal of the 4-H program that youth will grow through their project work. However, selecting projects that are age appropriate is very important to ensure that the child can accomplish their goals and find success.

Some projects are obviously more time consuming than others. Knowing the time commitment you have to each project is important for individual success and completion of the project. Having parent input on which projects are selected is also important. 4-H is a family organization. Although the 4-H club meeting and 4-H workshops can and do provide opportunities for youth to learn about a project and in some cases work on projects, it is, in most cases, during family time that most 4-H project work takes place. It should also be a family decision on projects to understand the financial commitment to each project. Knowing this upfront can help avoid stress later.

4-H projects provide amazing opportunities for young people to grow and develop skills, to explore new interests and to set and achieve personal goals. To see just what projects are available to you in 4-H, visit the 4-H Pick-a-Project website at

<http://4h.unl.edu/programs/curriculum/pickaproject>. □



Today's 4-H projects teach youth about science, engineering and technology through hands-on participation - such as at GPS technology workshops.

Zoo to You Gecko on Loan

by Kori Jensen, Mead High School

There is a new face in the *Companion Animals Class* at Mead High School. "Athena" is a leopard gecko. She is a visiting from the Lincoln Children's Zoo through the *Zoo to You* program and will stay until the end of March. The students in the companion animals class have learned about reptile care and have really grown to enjoy Athena.

The class takes turns caring for the gecko. They feed her five crickets three times a week. Give her fresh water and clean her cage each day. They monitor her weight and eating habits to share with the zoo. This ensures she stays healthy while in Mead. Athena has a



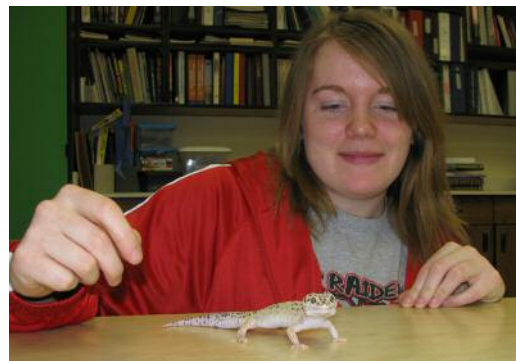
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heating pad on one side of her house that stays on all the time and a light that comes on during the day.

Leopard geckos are lizards native to Pakistan, India and Afghanistan where the terrain is dry and rocky. The geckos live on and under the ground and are nocturnal. They can live up to 20 years. Leopard geckos have claws rather than toe pads and are the only lizards that use vocalization to communicate within the species. Most geckos eat their shed skin and have enlarged tails that store fat, much like a camel's hump. Their tails can be dropped when grabbed by predators to escape.

The companion animal class is enjoying having Athena in class. Students hold her while working on assignments and have even taken her home for the weekend. Craig Thilliander said, "My favorite part of having Athena in class is watching her eat the crickets." □



MPS Student, Catherine Coady, gets her turn at taking care of Athena, the leopard gecko.

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